Direct Action

An Ethnography

by David Graeber
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A book this size is unusual nowadays. It was certainly not my initial plan. When I first decided to begin writing up some of my experiences of direct action from an ethnographic perspective, I actually had intended to write a fairly short book. But the more I wrote, the more the topic seemed to grow. I realized I was faced with a common dilemma of ethnographic writing: points that seem simple and obvious to anyone who has spent years inside a given cultural universe require a great deal of ink to convey to someone who hasn’t. Something similar had happened to me when I returned to Chicago from my dissertation research in Madagascar, many years ago. I remember fretting over just how much I had to say. I felt I had at best two or three really interesting points to make about the community I’d been studying. Then the moment I started writing, I realized that to explain any one of those points to someone who was not themselves from a rural Malagasy community would require several hundred pages. By the time I was done writing, I also realized that most readers would probably find the exposition much more interesting, all in all, than whatever I originally thought was the “point.”

Call this book, then, a tribute to the continued relevance of ethnographic writing. By “ethnographic writing,” I mean the kind that aims to describe the contours of a social and conceptual universe in a way that is at once theoretically informed, but not, in itself, simply designed to advocate a single argument or theory. There was a time when the detailed description of a political or ceremonial or exchange system in Africa or Amazonia was considered a valuable contribution to human knowledge in itself. This is no longer really the case. An anthropologist actually from Africa or Amazonia, or even some parts of Europe, might still be able to get away with writing such a book. Presently, the academic convention in America (which a young scholar would be unwise to ignore) is that one must pretend one’s description is really meant to make some larger point. This seems unfortunate to me. For one thing, I think it limits a book’s potential to endure over time. Classic ethnographies, after all, can be reinterpreted. New ones—however fascinating—rarely present enough material to allow this; and what there is tends to be strictly organized around a specific argument or related series of them.

Therefore, let me warn the reader immediately: there is no particular argument to this book—unless it’s, that the movement described within is well worth thinking about. This does not mean it does not contain theoretical arguments. Over the course of it, I make any number of them: whether about the ideological role of large heavy objects, the political implications of the word “opinion,” the similarity of writing news stories and Homeric epic composition, or the cosmological role of the police in American culture. What makes this an ethnographic work in the classic sense of the
term is that, as Franz Boas once put it, the general is in the service of the particular—aside, perhaps, from the final reflections. Theory is invoked largely to aid in the ultimate task of description. Anarchists and direct action campaigns do not exist to allow some academic to make a theoretical point or prove some rival’s theory wrong (any more than do Balinese trance rituals or Andean irrigation technologies), and it strikes me as obnoxious to suggest otherwise. I would like to think that, as a result, the interest of this book might also endure not only for those motivated by historical curiosity, who wish to understand what it was actually like to have been in the middle of these events, but to ask the same sort of questions the actors in it were raising, about the nature of democracy, autonomy, and possibilities—or for that matter, dilemmas, limitations—of strategies of transformative political action.

**SOME WORDS OF HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

Enough time has passed since the breathless days of 2000 and 2001 that one can begin, perhaps, to see that historical moment in a little bit of perspective. That period, it is now clear, marked a certain watershed for global neoliberalism. These were the years in which the “Washington Consensus” of the 1990s was shattered. It happened very quickly. In fact it is a testimony to the effectiveness of direct action that it took only about three years of large-scale popular mobilizations in order to do so.

It is sometimes hard to remember, nowadays, just what the days of the Washington Consensus were like. Perhaps it might be best to start then with a word of context, to help understand why it was that the Zapatista rebellion in 1994 served as such a catalyst for the global movement against neoliberalism that followed, and why that movement came to take the form it did.

**THE MOMENTARY SUSPENSION OF HISTORY**

The years just before the Zapatista rebellion in Chiapas announced itself to the world were probably the most depressing time to be a revolutionary—or even, dedicated to the ideals of the Left—in living memory. It wasn’t the collapse of the Stalinist regimes in Eastern Europe that was depressing; most radicals were glad to see them go. What was depressing was what happened afterwards. With Stalinism dead, most Marxists expected to see a renaissance of more humane forms of Marxism. Social democrats believed that they had finally won the argument with the revolutionary Left and expected to shepherd the former subjects of the Soviet bloc into their fold; a reasonable expectation, since when polled, most of the population of Central and Eastern Europe said they wanted to model their new economies on Sweden. Instead, they got shock therapy and the most savage form of unrestricted capitalism. In almost every way, the world seemed to be heading for a nightmare scenario. The romantic image of the guerilla insurrectionary, which captured so many imaginations in the 1960s, was cascading into a kind of obscene self-parody. Already
in the 1980s, the Right, which had been arguing for years that guerilla insurgencies in places like Vietnam, or Zimbabwe, or El Salvador were not spontaneous but fiendish schemes created by foreign ideologues, began to put their own theories into practice, with the US and South African intelligence agencies creating guerilla armies like the contras or RENAMO to sic on leftist regimes. At the same time, existing Marxist guerilla movements from Columbia to Angola that had begun full of high-minded rhetoric were increasingly prone to become pure bandit kings, or nihilistic armies without any cause beyond their own rebellion (those which held to the old ideal of social transformation, like the Shining Path in Peru, seemed if anything even worse). Liberation movements everywhere were transforming into vicious ethnic wars. Then came the wave of genocide, of which Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia were only the most dramatic and visible.

On a dozen interlocking registers simultaneously, the emerging pattern seemed catastrophic. It seemed like it would go something like this: On an international level, capitalism was transforming itself into a revolutionary force. Abandoning the welfare-state version of capitalism that had actually won the Cold War, the old Cold Warriors and their corporate sponsors were demanding a pure, no-holds-barred, free-market version that had never actually existed, and were willing to wreak havoc on all existing institutional social arrangements in order to achieve it. All this involved a kind of weird inversion. The standard right-wing line, since at least the 1790s, had always been that revolutionary dreams were dangerous precisely because they were utopian: they ignored the real complexity of social life, tradition, authority, and human nature, and dreamed of reshaping the world according to some abstract ideal. By the 1990s, the places had been completely reversed. The Left had largely abandoned utopianism (and the more it did so, the more it shriveled and collapsed), and even as they did so, the Right picked it up. Free-market “reformers” overnight began declaring themselves revolutionaries—the problem was, they did so as the worst sorts of Stalinists, essentially telling the world’s poor that science had proved there was only one way to go forward in history, that this was understood by a scientifically trained elite, and that, therefore, they had to shut up and do as they were told because, even though their prescriptions might cause enormous suffering, death, and dislocation in the present, at some point in the future (they were not sure quite when) it would all lead to a paradise of peace and prosperity. The fact that the “science” itself had shifted from historical materialism to free-market economics was a fairly minor detail; anyway, it makes it easier to explain how former Stalinists from Romania to Vietnam found it so easy to simply switch hats and declare themselves neoliberals. Meanwhile, as structural adjustment policies stripped away what small social protections had existed for the poorest inhabitants of the planet, propaganda and statistical manipulation had become so effective that most mainstream Americans who paid attention to such matters were convinced that conditions for the world’s poorest were actually improving, and not just in areas like East Asia that had mostly refused to adopt neoliberal policies.

Every progressive victory seemed to have been threatened or reversed. In South Africa, generations of struggle had finally eliminated racial apartheid; a moment of happiness, certainly, but an almost identical system was being created on a global scale, based on increasingly militarized borders, and on a labor migration regime
where, for those trapped in poor countries, residence in rich, largely white countries was dependent on possession of identity papers and willingness to work in jobs the residents themselves weren’t willing to do. Feminism was being retrenched. Former victories over sweatshop labor, child labor, even chattel slavery, were all being eroded or downright eradicated.

Much of the problem stemmed precisely from the rout of the dream of social revolution, and those utopian fantasies that had always been necessary to inspire people to the passion and self-sacrifice required to actually work to transform the world in the direction of greater freedom and greater equality. I am referring here to genuine, living utopianism—the idea that radical alternatives are possible and that one can begin to create them in the present—as opposed to what might be called “scientific utopianism”: the idea that the revolutionary is the agent of the inevitable march of history, which was so easily, and catastrophically, appropriated by the Right. The murder of dreams could only lead to nightmares. It made it almost impossible to form a center from which to fight the incursions of the (now super-charged, revolutionary) Right. Social Democratic parties in Europe, for example, which were born from a reformist strain of Marxism, first seemed rather pleased with the collapse of their revolutionary cousins—they had finally won the argument—until they realized that their own appeal, and the willingness of capitalists to engage with them, was almost entirely based on their ability to position themselves as the less threatening alternative. Before long, the social democratic regimes had experienced such a moral and political collapse that the few still in power were reduced to becoming the agents for the dismantling of the welfare states they had originally created. The activist Left in industrialized countries was becoming increasingly reactionary, capable of mobilizing passions only to defend things that already existed—the ozone layer, affirmative action programs, trees—and increasingly ineffectively. Elsewhere, it seemed in near total collapse.

Then, finally, there was “globalization.”

As Anna Tsing (2002) has recently reminded us, there’s a curious history here. The notion really began as a progressive one. It was a stronger version of internationalism: the sense not only that all men are brothers but that we are the common custodians of a single, fragile planet—an idea encapsulated by photographs of the earth taken from outer space by astronauts in the 1960s. The 1990s rhetoric of globalization had none of this. Essentially, it had two legs: one was that telecommunications—and particularly the Internet—were annihilating distance and making instant contact possible between any part of the planet; the other was that the fall of the Iron Curtain and other barriers to trade were, at the same time, creating a single, unified global market, whose financial mechanisms could then operate through these same instantaneous electronic means. Mainly, it was just about the power of finance capital. But the rhetoric was usually accompanied by a series of very broad generalizations: that not only money but products, ideas, and people were “flowing” about as never before, national economies could no longer dream of being autonomous; old nationalist ideologies, indeed, national borders, were becoming increasingly irrelevant, and so on. All of this was presented as happening all of its own accord. Technologies advanced, people were increasingly in contact with one another: the only possible language for them to deal with one another was trade—since capitalism was, after all, rooted in human nature.
For anyone who was really paying attention, of course, the reality was very different. Borders were not being effaced, but reinforced. Poor populations were still penned into their countries of origin (in which existing social benefits were being rapidly withdrawn). “Globalization” merely referred to the ability of finance capital to skip around as it wished and take advantage of that fact. Most of all, however, the period of “globalization”—or neoliberalism, as it came to be known just about everywhere except America—saw the creation of the first genuinely planetary bureaucratic system in human history.

In retrospect, I very much imagine that this is how the last years of the twentieth century will be seen. The UN had of course existed since mid-century, but the UN had never had more than moral authority. What was being patched together now was a system with teeth. At the top were the financiers—bankers, currency traders, hedge-fund operators, and the like—all connected electronically. There were the gigantic bureaucratically-organized transnationals that during this period were absorbing and consolidating literally millions of formerly independent enterprises. There were the global trade bureaucrats—International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank, World Trade Organization (WTO), and so on, but also including institutions like the US Federal Reserve, treaty organizations like the European Union (EU) or North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)—whose chief role seemed to be to protect the interests of the first two. And, finally, there were the various tiers of NGOs, whose role, from providing farm credits to inoculating infants or providing food during famines, increasingly came to be to provide services that states had once been expected to supply, but had effectively now been forbidden from doing by the IMF.

The remarkable thing was that this was achieved through an ideology of radical individualism: above all, a broad rejection of the claims of common community—and political community in particular. We were all to be rational individuals on the market, aiming to acquire goods. Insofar as we were different, it was to be a matter of personal self-realization through consumption, since consumption, in turn, was assumed to be largely about the creation and expression of identities. Then, of course, identity could be said to circle back: since all political and economic questions were assumed to be effectively settled (history, in this respect, was over) identity politics became about the only politics that could be considered legitimate.

**THEN HISTORY BEGAN AGAIN**

All this makes it easy to see why the Zapatista rebellion—which began January 1, 1994, the day in which the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) went into effect—marked such a turning point. The Zapatistas, with their rejection of the old-fashioned guerilla strategy of seizing state control through armed struggle, with their call instead for the creation of autonomous, democratic, self-governing communities, in alliance with a global network of like-minded democratic revolutionaries, managed to crystallize, often in beautiful poetic language, all the strains of opposition that had been slowly coalescing in the years before. As members of the Midnight Notes Collective aptly began pointing out even at the time, opposition to IMF-imposed
structural adjustment policies, (whether it took the form of Latin American indigenous rights campaigns, African food riots, or Indonesian Islamist movements) almost invariably was based on the moral defense of some collective resource: the right to treat land, or food, or fossil fuels, or even culture, not as a marketable commodity but as a common good collectively administered by some form of moral community—even if in fewer and fewer cases was the nation-state seen as the proper guardian of such rights or the framework of the moral community in question. Almost always, their sights were set both more locally and on a planetary scale. The Zapatistas, with their deft ability to employ emerging global communication technologies to mobilize international networks to defend their own autonomous enclaves in the Lacandon Rain Forest, were not only the perfect symbol, they managed to articulate what was happening through a new approach to the very idea of revolution.

In turn, it was the Zapatistas who began, with their two international encuentros “For Humanity and Against Neoliberalism,” to lay the foundation for what came to be known as the “anti-globalization” movement. Now this term, as I have said many times before, is something of a misnomer. It was basically an invention of the media. The most dynamic and important elements in the movement always saw it as aiming for a genuine, democratic form of globalization; at the very least a return to the sort of planetary consciousness from which the term first emerged. In the case of anarchists, autonomists, and other such radical elements, it meant the effacement of all international borders entirely. What emerged from the Zapatista encuentros was a loosely organized planetary network called Peoples’ Global Action (PGA), one of whose aims was to put nonviolent direct action back on the world stage as a force for global revolution. PGA was significant above all in that it explicitly rejected the participation of political parties or any group whose purpose was to become a government. It was PGA, in turn, that put out the first “calls to action” that eventually culminated in the November 1999 actions in Seattle. Rather than trying to narrative the story myself—it will be told many times, in different ways, over the course of the book—let me instead provide the reader with a time line of only the most important events. What follows is a bare-bones account, and it reflects a very North American perspective, but readers may find it useful to consult, now and again, while reading this work:

**January 1, 1994.** North American Free Trade Agreement goes into effect. Uprising by the EZLN (or Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional, or Zapatistas) in Chiapas begins with a surprise military offensive that leads, briefly, to the seizure of Chiapas’ capital, San Christobal de las Casas. The Zapatistas, however, quickly transform from an offensive force to a defensive one, creating a series of self-governing autonomous communities, seeking international allies, and promulgating a politics of direct action, democratic experimentation, and a new approach to revolution that converges with the anarchist tradition in its refusal of traditional attempts to transform through the seizure of state power.

**August, 1997.** Second Zapatista “International Encuentro For Humanity and Against Neoliberalism” in Spain ends with a call to create an international network, that ultimately comes to be known (in English) as Peoples' Global Action. Aside from the Zapatistas themselves, the core of PGA, at first, consists of the Brazilian Landless
Farmers’ Movement (MST), the Indian Karnataka State Farmers’ Association (KRRS, a mass-based Gandhian direct action movement), anarchist or anarchist-inspired groups including Ya Basta! in Italy and Reclaim the Streets in the UK, and various indigenous and agrarian movements and radical labor unions.

**June 18, 1999.** “J18,” the first massive PGA-sponsored global day of action, known alternately as the “Global Day of Action Against Financial Centers” or “Carnival Against Capitalism” to coincide with the G8 meetings of leaders of the major industrial powers, with coordinated actions in over a hundred cities worldwide from Australia to Zimbabwe. In America, several demos are organized, mostly under the banner of new American versions of Reclaim the Streets.

**November 30, 1999.** “N30” actions against the WTO ministerial meetings in Seattle, another international day of action proposed by PGA. The action is long in the planning but comes as a total surprise to the mainstream media, who see it as the birth of a movement. Seattle saw sharp divisions over tactics between nonviolent protesters conducting the lock downs and blockades of the hotel where the ministerial is taking place, organized by the newly created Direct Action Network (DAN), and participants in a smaller “Black Bloc,” mostly made up of anarchists and radical ecologists, who have a more militant interpretation of nonviolence, and who, after police begin to attack the blockaders, start a campaign of targeted property destruction against symbols of corporate power (mostly windows) downtown. On the first day, the meetings are actually shut down, and negotiations end in failure. The next few days see massive repression, culminating in the declaration of martial law and the summoning of the National Guard. The months immediately following Seattle are filled with a burst of new organizing and activity, and the creation of autonomous chapters of DAN in cities across the US, and even Canada.

**April 16, 2000.** “A16” actions against the meetings of the World Bank and IMF in Washington DC. While not as tactically successful as Seattle (the meetings are not shut down), A16 marks the beginning of a rapprochement between the DAN organizers and the autonomous Revolutionary Anti-Capitalist Bloc—the Black Bloc assembled for the occasion—with the RACB refraining from property destruction and instead providing support for blockaders and those in lockdown.

**August 1, 2000.** “R2K” actions against the Republican Convention in Philadelphia. Combined with D2K actions against the Democratic Convention in Los Angeles, these are collectively known among activists as R2D2. While LA DAN rejects widespread direct action for a strategy of marches in alliance with community groups, the Philly actions, organized above all by DANs in New York, Philly, and DC, mark further integration of Black Blocs and blockaders, with the “Revolutionary Anti-Authoritarian Bloc” in this case providing a diversion to draw police away from the lock downs. Philly is also marked by an attempt to create alliances between the mostly white DANs and radical people of color organizations, with mixed success. Retrospectively, it is seen as the point where the lockdown/blockade strategy has largely run its course, prompting an interest in creating more mobile tactics.

**September 26, 2000.** “S26” actions against the IMF/World Bank meetings in Prague, Czech Republic. This is the first large and dramatic action in Europe after Seattle. Like many European actions, the level of militancy is much greater than in the US. The actions see fierce clashes between Black Bloc anarchists and police, the first
appearance of the festive “Pink Bloc,” and the first international debut of the Italian “white overalls” tactics (the “Tute Bianche,” organized by Italian Ya Basta!), a kind of comic mock army of activists in helmets, padding, shields, and often inflatable inner-tubes, who attempt to storm police lines armed, among other things, with balloons and water pistols.

**January 20, 2001.** “J20” protests at Bush’s inauguration, the second largest inaugural protests in American history, though they receive almost no attention from the mainstream media. Most members of NYC DAN end up joining another Revolutionary Anti-Authoritarian Bloc. The Black Bloc manages to crash through police barricades and temporarily occupy Naval Memorial, hoisting a black flag and blocking the parade route, and Bush’s motorcade, for some time before finally being forced out by secret service and police.

**January 25–30, 2001.** The first World Social Forum (WSF) is held in Porto Alegre, Brazil. Originally conceived as the radical alternative to the World Economic Forum (WEF)—a kind of junket and networking session for global officials and bureaucrats, usually held in Davos, Switzerland—the WSF rapidly becomes the intellectual center of the global movement against neoliberalism, with thousands of different organizations and individuals participating in hundreds of sessions.

**April 20–22, 2001.** Actions against the “Summit of the Americas,” negotiations over the Free Trade Area of the Americas pact (FTAA) in Québec City, Canada. This is the first action where the authorities organize their strategy around building a large fence (“the wall”) around the section of the city where the summit is to take place. The actions, organized primarily by the Montréal-based Convergence des Luttes Anti-Capitalistes, or CLAC, mainly aim attacks at the wall itself, as a symbol of the contradictions of neoliberalism.

**July 19–21, 2001.** Several hundred thousand protesters converge on Genoa, Italy, for the G8 meetings of the heads of industrialized nations. The wall strategy is again employed, and Italian police, who had traditionally been relatively tolerant of white overall tactics, adopt a strategy of extreme repression this time, refusing any contact with protest leaders and employing a systematic strategy of encouraging fascists and agent provocateurs to provide excuses to attack, arrest, and afterwards, systematically abuse and even torture activists. Genoa is seen as a watermark of repression in Europe and causes European groups to scramble to formulate a new strategy.

**September 11, 2001.** Attacks on the Pentagon and World Trade Center. Anarchists in New York are among the first to mobilize against the upcoming war, with marches culminating in a march of six thousand people to Times Square a month after the event. These are almost completely ignored in the mainstream media. Actions being planned for the upcoming World Bank/IMF meetings in Washington DC are radically scaled back as the movement is forced to reconsider its overall strategic direction.

**February 3–4, 2002.** World Economic Forum protests in New York City. In the immediate wake of 911, the WEF announces it will relocate, this year, from Davos (where it has become the object of frequent activist sieges) to the Waldorf Astoria in New York “as an act of solidarity.” Anarchists in NYC DAN and the newly created NYC Anti-Capitalist Convergence (ACC) are forced to throw together an action in a matter of months, abandoned by almost all of their usual NGO and Labor allies. The action is successfully and nonviolently pulled off, but is met by massive police
intimidation and hundreds of arrests. The stress of 911, and of being forced to create a national mobilization out of nothing in such a short time, creates endless tensions within the New York scene and eventually leads to decline and eventual dissolution of DAN over the course of the next year.

**September 10–14, 2003.** WTO Ministerial in Cancín, Mexico. Mass actions by Mexican and global activists—including the dramatic suicide of a South Korean farmer—end in a definitive check of the WTO process.

**November 17–21 2003.** FTAA negotiations in Miami, met by the first genuinely large-scale national convergence in the US since 911. These meetings also see the first use, in the US, of a new policy of massive preemptive attacks and extreme police violence against protesters—an approach that comes to be known as the “Miami model” after Homeland Security announces it as the way to deal with such actions in the future. The free trade negotiations, on the other hand, come to nothing, marking the definitive end of the FTAA process.

I’ll end here, not because Miami represents the end of anything (though some have argued it marks the end of one cycle of at least the North American movement), but rather, because it marks the end of the period covered in this book. September 11 and the “War on Terror” did certainly create a dramatically new climate in the United States, but its effects elsewhere were less profound, and certainly less enduring. In other parts of the world, repression was never so severe, and most managed to avoid the wave of xenophobia and militarist nationalism that did so much damage in the US. In many ways, the movement began to go into a new and broader stage, particularly in Latin America, with the wave of factory occupations and local assemblies in Argentina, or one-time PGA conveners like Evo Morales actually coming to power in Bolivia, events in Atenco, Oaxaca, and other parts of Mexico itself. I do not want to generalize or make predictions: at moments of genuine change, history makes fools of all of us who try. But I will at least repeat what I have said before (e.g. Graeber 2002; Graeber and Grubacic 2004): that anarchism, as a political philosophy, and anarchist ideas and imperatives, have become more and more important everywhere in the world. There is a broad realization that the age of revolutions is by no means over, but that revolution will, in the twenty-first century, take on increasingly unfamiliar forms. First and foremost, I would hope this book will serve as a resource for those who wish to think about expanding their sense of political possibilities, for anyone curious about what new directions radical thought and action might take.

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have nothing but love for them.

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first and foremost, Eric Graeber, Ruth Graeber, Andrej Grubacic, Nhu Le, and Stuart
Rockefeller. I’d like to thank Charles Weigl, my editor, and everyone else at AK Press.

I came into this project with little but myself and my own sense of optimism. I
pursued it with the growing understanding that, no matter how bleak and how
dangerous some of the places through which one must pass, to live as a rebel—in the
constant awareness of the possibilities of revolutionary transformation, and amongst
those who dream of it—is surely the best way one can live.
INTRODUCTION

YOU BEGIN WITH RAGE, YOU MOVE ON TO SILLY FANTASIES . . .

“So,” Jaggi says. “I have an idea for what Ya Basta! might contribute to the actions in Québec City. The Canadian press keeps framing this as some kind of alien invasion. Thousands of American anarchists are going to be invading Canada to disrupt the Summit. The Québécois press is doing the same thing: it’s the English invasion all over again. So my idea is we play with that. We reenact the battle of Québec.”

Puzzled stares from the Americans at the table.

“That was the battle in 1759 in which the British conquered the city in the first place. They surprised the French garrison by climbing up these cliffs just to the west of the Plains of Abraham, near the old fort. So here’s my idea. You guys can suit up in your Ya Basta! outfits, and climb the exact same cliff, except—no, wait, listen! This part is important—over all the padding and the chemical jumpsuits, you’ll all be wearing Québec Nordiques hockey jerseys.”

“You want us to climb a cliff?” asked Moose.

“Oh huh.”

“And how high exactly is this cliff?”

“Oh, I don’t know, 60 meters. What’s that, about 180 feet?”

“So you want us to climb a 180-foot cliff geared up in gloves and helmets and gas masks and foam rubber padding?”—Moose acting as if Jaggi might actually be serious about this.

“Think of it this way: the helmets and padding would be very helpful if you fall down at all. Which is likely because you have to figure the cliffs will be defended.”

Moose: “Oh, great. So now we’re climbing a 180-foot cliff with riot cops all over the top.”

“Oh come on, you’re probably all going to get arrested immediately just for wearing those suits. You might as well actually do something with them first. And the symbolism would be perfect.”

“I refuse to be so pessimistic,” I say. “Let’s imagine some of us get through. We scale the cliffs. Suddenly we’re inside the security perimeter…”

“Well, actually, no,” says Jaggi, looking down at the map of the city. The map of the city is drawn in felt tip on a large unfolded napkin, on the table of a pastry shop in New York City’s Little Italy, surrounded by various salt shakers and sugar bowls being used to represent imaginary activist and police units, all flanked by empty bottles of beer and a former chocolate cake. Six activists are crowded around the table, three Canadians, three representatives of the New York Ya Basta! Collective—all that are left of what had started as a much larger group. “We’re kind of assuming the fence will